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THE LIFE OF CHRIST

RUFUS M. JONES

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THE LIFE OF CHRIST

By

RUFUS M. JONES

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WHY THIS COURSE IS PUBLISHED

THIS course has been prepared for those who wish to know more about the life of Christ. It comprises a very brief introduction to the subject and a guide to a few of the best books. The books are arranged for consecutive reading. They should be available in any general library, or may be obtained through any good book store.

A good general knowledge of the subject should result from following through the course of reading suggested in this booklet. If you wish to pursue the subject further, the librarian of your Public Library will be glad to make suggestions. If you desire to increase your knowledge in other fields, you are referred to the other courses in this Reading with a Purpose series, and to your Public Library.

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THE AUTHOR

RUFUS M. JONES *is a professor of philosophy and a practicer of religion. His simplicity of expression and understanding mind have made his writings loved by all ages and types of people. For readers of reflective mind he has written* STUDIES IN MYSTICAL RELIGION, FUNDAMENTAL ENDS OF LIFE *and many others; for the more objective temperament he has created anew the lives of religious leaders in such books as* STORIES OF HEBREW HEROES *and* SPIRITUAL REFORMERS OF THE SIXTEENTH AND SEVENTEENTH CENTURIES. *His own life of Christ,* THE BOY JESUS AND HIS COMPANIONS, *and his books on Bible characters and religious heroes have won him the affection of hosts of boys and girls.*

As professor at Haverford College, lecturer, preacher, and writer, he has been primarily an interpreter of the inward and mystical aspect of religion. But in practice his religion has found concrete expression in many ways, notably in relief work and in the fostering of education. He has been chairman of the Quaker European relief work both during and since the war and is president of the Board of Trustees of Bryn Mawr College. And in the midst of these special duties added to his regular work as

a professor, he has become a well-known speaker in college and university chapels, has edited Quaker journals, and has found time to add more than a score of books to the religious literature of the century.

THE LIFE OF CHRIST

THE most important fact of human history, by common agreement, I think, is the fact of Christ's life. The supreme influence that has ever radiated out from a single life is almost certainly the spiritual force which has come from this person. Great revolutions in thought come and go. There are eras of faith and of materialism. There are times when the world seems absorbed in conquest, or in quick temporal successes. But Christ continues through all the shifts and changes to be the major spiritual interest of the race. Theories about him may rise and fall, but he meantime is as vital and as dominant as ever in the heart and mind of all serious persons. The Church may, for a period, lose its hold upon the lives of men, but they kindle and respond the same as ever to the charm of his personality and to his profound yet simple message. There is more light yet to break forth from his words and his spirit, and he still remains in a unique way the central spiritual hope of the world.

If these things are so, then the story of Christ's life ought to make a powerful appeal to those who are interested in life and in books. It is an interesting point, and one which verifies this claim, that

the Gospels which are the original sources of our knowledge about him are the best selling books in the world—the annual sales reaching something like eight million copies. It is a further confirmation that whenever a vital biography or interpretation of his life comes from the press, it takes its place at once in the forefront of all books on the market. Every fresh fact about him and every new insight into the meaning of his life is welcomed with a peculiar enthusiasm.

Multitudes still go each year to see the land where he lived and taught. Every scene which can with any certainty be associated with his earthly life becomes thereby touched with a new interest and glory. The hills of Galilee are different from all other hills because he walked over them. The Lake of Gennesaret has a charm all its own because he did his works of love and mercy around these shores. The visitor feels a peculiar awe in Bethlehem, in Bethany, in Gethsemane, in the streets of Jerusalem and on the Mount of Olives because each spot there is hallowed with some memory of him. It would be worth much to our deeper life if, in these times of controversy and discussion, we could go back to the head waters of the great stream of Christian faith and feel the supreme power of that central life. What we find when we go back to these head waters is not a new formulation of doctrines, or a new theory of the

Church, or a new set of commandments, but a new and wonderful person through whom ever since fresh currents of life have been flowing into the spiritual thought and achievements of the world.

No life, however, has been lived which is more difficult to write in adequate fashion than his. One reason for the difficulty is the absence of exact, specific biographical material. He wrote nothing himself. There are no intimate letters—no letters at all. No contemporaries outside of his immediate circle furnish us with any information. Except for narratives of his birth, and of his appearance in the temple at the age of twelve, we have no details of his life before his thirtieth year—the period of utmost importance for the formation of aims and character. But even after his public life has begun, we cannot follow his steps, or the unfolding of his message, in any continuous way. We have preserved for us, at most, incidents out of only about fifty days of his entire life. The rest is blank. We have, too, extremely meager knowledge about his home, his friends, and his disciples.

Another reason for the difficulty of writing his life is the problem of deciding upon the relative historical value of the four documentary narratives which have come down to us from the first century; that is, the four Gospels. If these accounts were entirely parallel, it would make a vast difference in the task, but

they are not altogether parallel. The first three are similar in general type; the fourth is unique and has a style and outlook all its own. These first three—*Matthew*, *Mark* and *Luke*—are usually called "Synoptic Gospels," because they agree in telling pretty much the same events in similar language, presenting side by side a common point of view. Scholars do not quite agree yet on the dates when these narratives were written, but there is a wide consensus of judgment that the Gospels of *Matthew* and *Luke* are largely composed of earlier existing documents. Two of these underlying documents can be very clearly marked out. Both of these Gospels reproduce nearly the whole of *Mark*, keeping in the main his exact words. They draw, besides, very heavily upon another document which has not come down to us, as *Mark* has, in separate form. This lost document was a collection of the sayings of Jesus, sometimes called "the Logia," and sometimes called by scholars "Q," from the initial of the German word *Quelle* which means "a source." *Matthew* and *Luke* also have other source material besides *Mark* and the collection of sayings; for example, *Luke* has the two marvelous parables, the "Prodigal son" and the "Good Samaritan," which could not have been in the collection of sayings, for in that case, the writer of *Matthew* would surely have used them. Canon B. H. Streeter in his notable book, *The four Gospels*, dates the writing of

Mark before 70 A.D., *Matthew* about 85 A.D., and *Luke* between 80 and 85 A.D.

The fourth Gospel is quite unlike the other three in style, thought, outlook, background and spirit. Christ's messages as reported in the fourth Gospel are very dissimilar to those in the Synoptic Gospels. His manner of speech is no longer in parables or in vivid paradoxes; it is now more in the nature of set discourses. The incidents are, too, in large measure different. The scene of activity has shifted to a considerable extent from Galilee to Judea. The order of events and some of the dates are altered. The attitude of the writer toward Christ and the estimate of Christ's position in the universe have undergone a profound transformation. He is not primarily a teacher now; he is thought of as the Logos of God; that is, the Word, or Revelation of God, and the creative spiritual Energy of the universe.

The fourth Gospel is quite obviously an *interpretation* of Christ rather than a collection of incidents and sayings about him. It gives us Christ as he was seen through the years of experience and reflection by one who had known him in youth and loved him and been loved by him. The writer was almost certainly living and writing in Ephesus toward the end of the first century. He probably had all the other Gospels before him and many new facts as well, and he wrote with a conviction that some of the facts

reported in the other Gospels needed correction, but his aim was to tell the world what Christ had come to mean to him: "These things are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ and that believing you may have life through his name." (John xx: 31)

These, then, are the sources of the material for a life of Christ. There is, of course, a large amount of information to be gathered about the background and setting of his life. Fortunately, the world of external nature which surrounded him in the beautiful Galilee of his childhood and youth is pretty much the same world which is there for us to see now. The *Old Testament*, which was the great living book of vital influence on his thought and character, is at hand for us to study. We know, too, what expectations ruled and thrilled his age. They are written in the apocalypses which have come down to us. We know what the Roman colonial government was like. We can picture the wickedness of the Herods. We can discover what taxes the Nazareth family paid. We know how ancient carpenters lived and toiled. All these things supply incidents for a biography, but they throw very little light upon the wonder and mystery of this unique life. They fail to tell us how this carpenter boy from a provincial town of Palestine, without wealth, education or culture, or any worldly endowments, became the most dynamic person that has ever lived.

The realist biographers like to insist that the narrative of Christ's life must conform to the bare facts which contemporary accounts supply. It must ignore, they say, what later interpreters have found in Christ. It must go back of the faiths and beliefs of the ages and build only on the actual verifiable data of the period in which he lived and preached and wrought. This kind of a biography, though thin and meager, would give us, they think, the "real" Jesus Christ, the actual person who healed the sick and loved the little children and preached in the fields or by the lake and died at thirty-three on a cross, "under Pontius Pilate."

The trouble with this method of parsimony and restraint in writing biographies is that one does not get the "real" person that way. We should never get the "real" Socrates, or the "real" Saint Francis, or the "real" Abraham Lincoln, if we confined ourselves to the bare contemporary facts about any one of these lives. The meaning and significance of each one of them came to light only slowly through the perspective of time and events. We now know the real Socrates and Saint Francis and Lincoln in a much truer and profounder way than their immediate contemporaries knew them.

No one has ever lived whose life has heightened in power and grown in meaning through the perspective of the years to the same extent as is the case with

Christ. We cannot altogether leave out of account, therefore, what the great interpreters have found in him. He must have been the kind of person that aroused faith and wonder and that made men feel that he needed to be interpreted. What he has done through the centuries is in itself a stupendous *fact*, as important certainly for his complete biography as any fact contemporary with his life. He must have been the kind of person that could do what he has done. We shall not know him fully until we not only see him in the humble circle in Galilee in the early first century, but also take account as well of the amazing creative and recreative power of his life as the later centuries have unrolled. We cannot altogether do, therefore, without the results of interpretation if we want to find the "real" Jesus Christ. We must not only go back to the headwaters of Christianity, but we must see what rivers of life have flowed out of these headwaters.

I have kept this point in mind in making my selection of lives of Christ for the modern reader. We want to get away as far as we can from artificial convention, tradition and theology, and get back as closely as we can to the living, palpitating person himself; but at the same time, we want to see what he has come to mean to sincere and devout men who have spent much of their lives studying him and endeavoring to grasp his unique message.

Here are some of the essential points which should have, I think, clear and emphatic expression in a life of Christ:

1. It should deal with the natural, political, social, economic and religious environment of life in Palestine, so that the reader can feel at home in that world of the first century.

2. It should set forth the great aims, ideals, hopes and expectations of the people in that generation, give an account of the development of the important body of apocalyptic writings, and tell briefly of the influential sects of the time, such as Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes, and the groups of quiet seekers in the land.

3. It should study with insight the preparatory work of John the Baptist, the events connected with Jesus' baptism, and, above all, the immense significance of the temptation.

4. It should bring out the unique way in which he made contacts with all kinds and classes of men and women, his new spirit of fellowship, his interest in friendship, his love of children and their love of him, his faith in those who had tried and failed, his marvelous power to understand others, his human sympathy and tenderness—in short, his *method.*

5. His *way of life* should be strongly stressed. I mean by that his absolute trust and confidence in his divine Father, his unlimited faith in men as possible

sons of God, his spirit of grace, or spontaneous and uncalculating love, his refusal to resort to force for spiritual ends, his faith that the cross would be, not the defeat, but the triumph of his life-purpose; and finally his peaceful and joyous acceptance of this way.

6. The great lines of his teaching, as well as his method as a teacher, should be interpreted. The points I should want emphasized would be:

a God is Father.

b All men are potential sons of God.

c The kingdom of God is coming here in the world (interpreted by a careful study of the kind of kingdom he expected).

d Human life has infinite possibilities and may be spiritually raised to become eternal life.

e The redemptive way of life is sacrifice and self-giving.

7. There should finally be a reverent treatment of those lofty traits of life and personality and those aspects of wonder and mystery in his life, which have made him the supreme figure in the spiritual history of the race. This is what Charles Lamb meant when he said: "If Shakespeare came into the room, we should all rise to our feet; if Jesus Christ came in, we should all kneel."

In the face of all the difficulties to be surmounted in writing this life, and in view of the fact that so much

is called for in a consummate life of Christ, it is not surprising that no one perfect life has yet been written. We must draw upon more than a single one in order to get an all-round and comprehensive view.

There have been a few very startling and spectacular lives of Christ written either by persons who possessed literary genius of a high order, or by individuals who were controlled by some over-mastering theory to account for him. Such books, in some instances, have had a great vogue and an immense temporary interest, but they go by and have their day. Christ is too deeply embedded in the spiritual life of humanity to be disposed of by some newly discovered theory, and he is too rich and many-sided, and at the same time too quiet and simple a character, to be presented in any permanent way by brilliant hits of genius.

There have been a few extensive and monumental lives of him written in earlier times. Some of these larger works are still vital and valuable. The best of these, written in English, is, I think, *The life and times of Jesus the Messiah* by Alfred Edersheim. It is a work in two large volumes, full of careful research and supplying the reader with much pertinent and illuminating information. But most readers do not want such heavy tomes. They want a briefer, more compact book, with a lighter touch and a more revealing style. The facts must be thoroughly sound and re-

liable, the vision clear and penetrating, the judgment wise and discriminating, and, withal, there must be the skill and power to tell a story, to arouse interest, to hold attention, to quicken imagination and to stir the deeper levels of the soul. The books I have chosen have these qualities to quite a degree, and they have been long enough before the reading public to have been pretty well weighed and tested. I trust the reader will find the satisfaction in them that I have found. There is a "survival of the fittest" among books as there is everywhere in life, and those which prove to be enduring and abiding are sure to possess some real qualities of worth.

I should strongly recommend that those who propose to follow this course should begin by freshly reading, or rereading, the four Gospels. For most persons the result will be more effective if one of the new translations is used. The words of the older translation are more poetic and beautiful and they seem more sacred, but just because they are so familiar it is easy to slide along over the well-known phrases without noticing the inner deeper meaning. Habit and custom harden the touch and dull the mental response. New words, fresh phrases, unusual and unexpected turns of thought, awaken interest and quicken attention. One needs to recover some of that innocency and wonder with which these words were met by their first hearers. I prefer Moffatt's trans-

lation[1] to any other of the new ones. Its English is refined and elevated and it follows very closely the original Greek. Some will perhaps choose rather to read Goodspeed's rendering[2] because of its American flavor and its easy natural flow. That should be as each reader wishes. I only want to urge that one should take up the modern biographies with his mind first freshly fed on the remarkable documents of eye-witnesses.

With this brief introduction and survey, we will now turn to consider the selection of books which I have made for this reading course.

THE JESUS OF HISTORY
By T. R. Glover

The Jesus of history is a remarkable book and the best one I know for beginning a course of study in the life of Christ. The author is a famous classical scholar in St. John's College, Cambridge, England, a noted historian, and one of the leaders of The British Student Christian Movement, for which this book was originally written. There is an excellent chapter on the childhood and youth of Jesus. One of the most penetrating sections of the book is Dr. Glover's study of the mind of Jesus in his chapter, "The man and his mind." Here is a beautiful unfolding of the tender

[1]Moffatt, James. *The New Testament: a new translation together with the authorized version.* Doran, 1922.

[2]Goodspeed, Edgar J. *The New Testament: an American translation.* Univ. of Chicago Press, 1923.

grace of Christ's method and manner of intercourse and teaching. It is full of wonderful and unusual touches. Dr. Glover has a way of putting his finger on a phrase which has generally passed unnoticed and he suddenly reveals through it some rare trait of the great Master. His wide knowledge of the language in which the Gospels are written enables him often to seize some fresh point which had passed unsuspected before, and his peculiar insight and spirit make him succeed where others have failed. The chapter on "Jesus and man" is likewise fresh and unique. Here we have a vivid presentation of the parables and swift, sudden flashes of thought, sentiment or humor which stay forever after in the mind. "The choice of the cross" is also a chapter which brings before us a new way of looking at the deepest issues of Jesus' life and work. The book closes with a brief but memorable treatment of the way the incarnation has made known what were before the two great unknown quantities of our world—God and Man. Apart from Christ, they were like a mysterious x and an unknown y. Through him, both are revealed and made known.

This book breaks its own fresh path. None of the other books in this list are at all like it. Some readers will perhaps prefer a book which is constructed more on the lines of a biography and if so, that desire will be met better by some of the other books.

BY AN UNKNOWN DISCIPLE

An anonymous writer, whose touch reveals her to be a woman, has given us, under the interesting title, *By an unknown disciple*, a very remarkable book. It is written in the form of another Gospel, as though the writer had been an eye-witness. It would have been very easy to step over the limits and spoil this bold attempt to portray the life of the Master, but that did not happen. The writer shows throughout fine restraint, excellent balance, good taste, and wise insight.

The pictures are so clear and vivid that one feels almost as though he were seeing the scenes before his eyes. There is, of course, much that is imaginative, but it is always imagination working with actual historical material. The writer has faithfully gathered facts and details of what happened and then has presented them in this novel and impressive fashion as a first-hand narrative. It is everywhere reverent, and at the same time there is something very real and intimate about the scenes.

The book opens with a most graphic picture of the man possessed with a legion of demons, living among the tombs. Every way of taming him by *force* has been tried in vain. Jesus meets him calmly when he is in the act of running and shrieking and cutting himself with sharp flints. Everybody except Jesus runs away in terror from him, but almost at

once in the presence of one who is not afraid and whose face is full of love and tenderness, the madman undergoes a mighty change and becomes quiet, peaceful, and ordered in his mind. The story is told with great power and the reader feels perhaps as never before what miracles can be wrought by faith and love.

Each incident in the book is told with similar conviction and power. The most impressive narrative of all, and the most moving one, is the account of the trial and crucifixion. It is all extraordinarily real and actual and the reader will feel, I think, something in this account that he has never felt before in this great event of the ages.

This book is not a complete life of Christ and does not at all cover the field which I have previously outlined, but it is a remarkable contribution. Children usually love to read it, and it is equally good for those who are older and more mature. It is particularly valuable for those who have not visited the Holy Land and who want graphic pictures of oriental life and scenery.

THE LIFE AND TEACHING OF JESUS
By E. I. Bosworth

This and the two following books are, in general style and manner of construction, somewhat alike, though each one of the three has its own peculiar qualities and specific characteristics. E. I. Bosworth

is Professor of New Testament in the Oberlin School of Theology. He is well known as a writer of religious books and as a lecturer at religious conferences and gatherings of young people. He finds the unique significance of Jesus to be in his *profound religious experience*, and he has written his life to make that experience clear to the reader and to interpret its meaning. The background is very well sketched. There is an excellent presentation of religion in Palestine as Jesus found it. The time of decision concerning his message and mission, in what is usually known as the temptation, is extremely well dealt with. The main body of the book is devoted to a helpful study of the unfolding message of Jesus as set forth in his preaching and in his training of his twelve assistants. A great deal of stress—but not too much—is put upon the nature and meaning of the kingdom of God—when and where and how it is to come. All the problems of his life and movements and teaching are considered, and the author's conclusions are full of value and suggestiveness. The writer is himself a person of deep Christian experience, and he is able to feel and describe with warmth and intimacy the meaning of Christ's experience in the crucial moments of his life. The book will help its readers to follow with clear insight the steps and stages of this great life, to view with new eyes objective facts in relation to their spiritual significance.

THE LIFE OF JESUS OF NAZARETH
By Rush Rhees

Rush Rhees is now president of the University of Rochester, New York, though this book was written twenty-five years ago while he was a seminary professor. It is the only book in my list that has a map of Palestine. It is an admirable study of Christ's life and teaching. It is written in easy style and simple direct manner of expression. It is marked by deep religious feeling, and will be pretty sure to settle rather than unsettle the reader. At the same time, the author meets and deals with perplexing difficulties and baffling situations. Each section of the book is preceded by an outline of events for that period of Christ's life, with a list of references to the Gospels. It is well arranged for purposes of study.

JESUS OF NAZARETH
By George A. Barton

Dr. Barton, the author of *Jesus of Nazareth,* is professor of Semitic languages in the University of Pennsylvania and also professor in the Episcopal Divinity School of Philadelphia. He has lived in Palestine and he has been a life-long student of the great Galilean. This book is the work of a scholar, and is marked throughout by reverence, insight and a profound love for Christ. It contains an excellent description of the country and the external conditions. It gives a valuable study of the way people thought about nature, dis-

ease, demons and miracles, done reverently and at the same time with sound scholarship. The writer inclines to the conservative view that the Gospel of *Mark* was written as early as 41 A.D. He has a very interesting chapter on Nazareth as an ancient village, and on the home life there in Jesus' time. I know of no one who has done this better or who has handled in a more interesting way the type of education which prevailed in Galilee. Each chapter is an important contribution to the topic studied in it and also to some aspect of Christ's life and message.

A SMALL TOWN MAN
By Mary Austin

Mary Austin's book is unique, quite unlike any of the others. It is not a systematic book, not the fruit of scholarship—though she has spent many years of faithful work on it—and it does not follow any of the well-known lines or methods. It is a fine piece of literature, full of graphic descriptions, vivid touches and flashes of insight. She has caught and interpreted better than almost anyone else the mystical experience of Jesus and the mystical features of his religion.

All men revere and honor Christ, but too few of us know him and take the pains to see and feel the full significance of his life. Perhaps these six books which I have recommended will aid in accomplishing that purpose. If they do all I hope, they will lead him who follows this course to the reading of yet other

books of this character from which he will not only gather inspiration, but will gain the richness and spiritual power which come from fellowship with such a supreme personality.

"That one Face, far from vanish, rather grows,
Or decomposes but to recompose,
Becomes my universe that feels and knows."

BOOKS RECOMMENDED IN THIS COURSE

THE JESUS OF HISTORY . . . . . *T. R. Glover*
Association Press, 1917. $1.50

BY AN UNKNOWN DISCIPLE . . . . . .
Doran, 1919. $1.25

THE LIFE AND TEACHING OF JESUS . . . *E. I. Bosworth*
Macmillan, 1924. $2.50

THE LIFE OF JESUS OF NAZARETH . . . . . *Rush Rhees*
Scribner, 1900. $2.00

JESUS OF NAZARETH . . . . . *George A. Barton*
Macmillan, 1922. $2.25

A SMALL TOWN MAN . . . . . *Mary Austin*
Harper, 1925. $2.00

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